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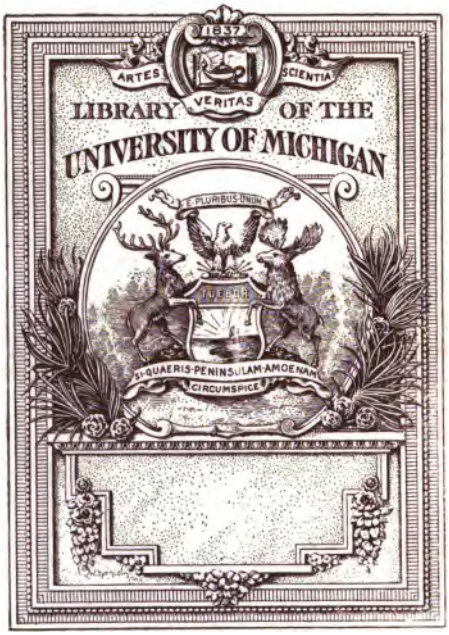
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THE MISSIVE

A DRAMATIC POEM

BY

MAUD MAY PARKER

BOSTON
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Publishers
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TO

MY HUSBAND

172619

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Theophilus . . . . A Rich Merchant
Antigone . . . . . His Wife
Lysander . . . Friend to Theophilus
Thyrsis . . . . . A Slave
1st Watchman
2d Watchman
1st Philosopher
2d Philosopher
A By-stander

Chorus of citizens returning from the games:
Priests, Dancers, Weavers of the Peplos, Charioteers, etc.

PART I

MORNING: Athens, A. D. 75.

Period of the Pan Athenaeic Festival.

Scene I. (*A large hall, at the centre of the end of which is the sacred fire burning to Hestia. At the other end are marble seats, over which skins are thrown. The floor is of mosaic; and resting upon a leopard skin, in the centre, is a bier upon which lies the body of Cleanthes, the only son of Theophilus and Antigone.*

Kneeling by the bier, with one arm thrown across the dead child, convulsed with sobs, is Antigone.

Nearby on a carven couch, Theophilus sits wearily. Standing near the entrance of the hall, which is hung with rich stuffs from Syria, is Thyrsis, the slave boy. This hall opens into a sunny court-yard which is surrounded by a marble colonnade. In the centre of this court-yard is a fountain playing; and at the entrance is seen a statue of Apollo.

This entrance leads into a narrow vestibule, at the end of which a door stands open into the street. Through this is seen a great procession winding its way towards the Acropolis. Horsemen and dancers; young girls with garlands of roses; men bearing torches; gymnasts and charioteers, on their way to the Pan Athenaeic Festival.

The Procession of the Peplos.)

THEOPHILUS

How heavy hangs the morn! Dost stand there lad
Still gazing through the door that let death in?
Come, draw the curtains Thyrsis. There—didst see
The Cavalcade in glorious beauty 'neath
The mid-day sun, as towards th' Acropolis
It wound its joyous way? Sweet rose-crowned girls
And bearded athletes; lads with eager steps,
All singing life's sweet song—as if there were
No death. No death, great Zeus! when he, our boy,
Our own Cleanthes lies upon yon bier;
Wearing his grave-clothes with a smile,—that smile
That he was always wont to wear in life!
Go, leave us Thyrsis—join the motley throng;
Sing thou thine anthem to the great Athene!

THYRSIS

My master, I will join it not!—These gods
Of Greece are naught to me, since Luke told of
A gentle God, his Hebrew mother once
Had seen—Who walked with men: who healed the sick
And raised the dead!—What cares the mighty Zeus
For sick or dead, while in the fair white arms
Of Hera, lies he sleeping all the while;
Or, what the proud Athene in her robe
Wove by the maids on the Acropolis!

ANTIGONE

(Raising herself from the bier.)

Raised the dead, Thyrsis? Raised the dead thou say'st?

THEOPHILUS

Go, Thyrsis—we will speak of this anon.
(Exit Thyrsis.)

(To Antigone.)
Come, my Antigone; cease thy long sobs;
Lay thy dear head upon my breast, my wife,
As thou wast wont to do in the old days
When thou and I were all in all; we two
Who never thought a third would come with hands
To hold our hearts within their tender clasp;
Only to leave a void larger than death.
Dost mind thee of that day he lisped a word,
—The tender word of—"Mother"—and content
He clasped his arms around thy neck, sinking
His head within the soft curve of thy chin;
And thou, supreme in thy young Motherhood
Didst call:
"Theophilus, already he
Has learned the trick of nestling close to me
As I to thee! I wonder if he knows
The heart-beats throbbing 'gainst his own, as I
Do thine?

—Come, lay thy head here now,—where thou
Canst feel my pulses beating while I speak;
For I have that to say which thou must hear!"

ANTIGONE

(*Rising and seating herself by him.*)

Say on, Theophilus, what matters now!
Thy heart-beats only hammer out the sound
—Cleanthes is dead! Is robbed of life's flow'r
Before its rosy petals bloomed. How dark
For him the grave, who never knew the light;
Who never tasted of life's sweets: for him
No fair-haired wife to fold him in her arms;
No prattling babe to climb upon his knee:
But Hades!—with its portals gaping wide,
Where cold and pallid forms will take his hand
And bid him enter to its dark abode;
And shades, who've known the joy of life, will tell
Him of its radiant hues, and make the air
In which he breathes, more dense and ebon still!
Theophilus, if Lucas had been here
He had not died! Wot you how once before
Our tender babe was in the vale of death,
And Lucas cured him with those drops procured
In Alexandria? And I, who held
Him on my knee; feeling each heart-beat by
Mine own, did watch his sweet breath leaping back;
Mine own eyes mirrored in his bit of Heaven!
Theophilus, why didst make Lucas free?

THEOPHILUS

Antigone, it was of Lucas that
I wished to speak.
Dost mind thee of that day
Long gone; (when thou thyself wast but a child)
That coming back from Syria, with silks
Most rare and purple dyes, I tarried for
A day in Antioch?—and drawing near
A well—that I might rest and give unto
My camels drink; I saw a slender lad
Not taller than Cleanthes now. His hair
Was dark and hung in curls about his neck.
So much alone I saw, and his bronze limbs
Burned to a richer hue by Syrian suns.
And as I mused, with half shut eyes, dreaming
Of Greece and thee, I saw unmindful of
Me, that his right hand traced upon a stone
Some imagery.

ANTIGONE

Ay, often have I seen
Him thus, on some such occupation bent!

THEOPHILUS

Calling unto the lad (who knelt with such
Deep fixity of gaze) to know of what
He did perchance: slowly, with thought, he raised
His eyes, and Mighty Zeus!—the sun itself

Was hid when I beheld his face, so like
Great Phoebus did he seem; wearing upon
His pure white brow, that look of truth and strength
Which only Phidias' hand could give!—methought
Too, that his great eyes had a wondrous trick
Of looking further than the gods could see:
—But—simply answered though the lad; in sweet
And gentle accents in his Hebrew tongue:
" I trace upon this stone, the likeness of
Thy camels. Is aught wrong in that?
The law
Says:
' Thou shalt not make unto thee any
Likeness,'"
And I made answer unto him:
" Dear lad, I see no wrong; but would'st thou like
To go to fair Athena in the land
Of Greece?—I have a garden there, rich with
Sweet flow'rs and shrubs of every hue—Myrtles,
Oleanders, and great citron-trees; there thou
Canst draw and paint, and listen to the song
The waves sang to Aegeus long ago!
By all the mighty gods! I'll make thee too
A man of Physics: for thou hast upon
That brow so strong, more than the simple arts
Of drawing lines, or wielding brush!
What is
Thy name?
Lucanus, sayst thou?
I will
Call thee Lucas, or perchance Luke; and thou
Shalt be to me more than my other slaves!"

ANTIGONE

Methinks we never thought of him as slave;
Such was our love for him, and his for us.
Oft have I seen him with Cleanthes—
(Throwing herself on the bier in a frenzy of grief) Oh
Theophilus, our lad, our precious lad!
(Controlling herself)
But go thou on, my tears do break thy tale—

THEOPHILUS

(Drawing her away)

So taking his small hand we found, within
The field nearby, his Hebrew mother—On
Her lap a babe, and others standing 'round
With that sad look of patience which one sees
Upon the faces of the young who want.
Explaining her my mission, with great tears
And sobs, she placed the hand of Lucas in
Mine own.
"Take him—good master and entreat
Him well! He is my first born, and my joy,
My pride; but burning suns have crisped the fields
Of wheat; and we are like to perishing!
Perchance the pittance that he leaves, will keep
Alive the younger little mouths; and he
Will have his fill where all is plenteous
The great Jehovah be with thee and him!"
—The rest thou knowest, my Antigone.

Ay, wot I well the day thou brought'st him home;
—The little Jewish lad with Greek god face!
A little wistful too, methought he looked
When I did question him of Antioch;
And of his mother and his Hebrew gods.
" Gods! sayest thou? We have no gods, save one;
The great Jehovah!"
Then, with voice, as rich
And full as Orpheus' stringed instrument;
He did relate a curious tale—learned at
His mother's knee—of some small babe, this God
Had sent to save the world;—as if a babe
Could war against our Mighty Zeus!—and I
Did laugh, and pinch him on the ear. " What tale
Is this, Lucanus? Thou wilt soon be grown,
With man's nobility and strength: Believest
Thou this?—And more with his great eyes than with
His voice, he said:
" Yea Mistress:—I believe!"

THEOPHILUS

Years have gone by, and this dear lad has grown
To be a man, with flower more mature
Than e'en the bud gave hope; pre-eminent
In Physics, as in Arts;—yet through the years
Accustomed to strange thoughts and wondrous dreams!

Dost mind thee of that night our little babe,
Our own Cleanthes lay in that deep sleep,
When Lucas came and tore him from the jaws
Of death, to give him rosy, safe and warm
Into thy tender arms?—Worn with the weight
Of anguish I had felt, I sought relief
Within the cool crisp night; and wandering through
The grove of myrtles,—blooming white beneath
The clear, sweet stars; I came upon him. Worn
He looked, and well nigh spent; and yet, upon
His brow a look of radiance. Stepping near
That I might speak such words of thanks as my
Poor lips could frame;—I heard him sobbing forth
A name, so vibrant in the silver air
That all the myrtle-trees, methought, took up
The ecstacy of sound; and little waves
Upon the beach echoed the name—"Christus!"
"Lucas!" I said—and as he heard the call,
His tear dimmed eyes met mine; and we, two men,
Strong in men's strength, were not ashamed to weep.
"Ask what thou wilt," I said "and I will give
It thee:— For thou hast saved Cleanthes' life
My precious babe—my only born; and thou
Thyself, hast been to me not as a slave
But as another child!"
And with great tears:
"Theophilus, once thou didst give me life,
And more besides, for thou didst nobly add
With thine own wisdom, wisdom's crown to mine;
And now I ask of thee, the gift of mine
Own life, to give again!
—The call has come
And I must needs obey it.—For through long

And weary years, methinks I've heard a voice;
—As soft and low as mine own Hebrew mother's;
Saying in sweet and tender tones:—Lucas!
' My own sheep hear my voice and follow me'
—Master, I love thee none the less, nor fair
Antigone: but give me freedom! Let
Me answer the long call; for I must go
E'en though it lead me in the way the dear
Christ went before!—Perchance, some day, thou too
Wilt hear the call."
And I did answer him:
" Not I, Lucanus, but go thou, dear lad;
Seek you your Christ; the gods will do for me,
And my Antigone, and our Cleanthes.
One rippling laugh of his is more to me
Than all the gods!"

ANTIGONE

One rippling laugh! His voice
Was like the sound of nightingales within
The Ilex-groves; or love-song of the bees
Unto the Spring-Anemones!—Never
Again to hear that voice!

THEOPHILUS

Antigone
Lean closer love; put thy small hand in mine
And thy dear heart upon my heart. Let thy
Soul leap as mine to thoughts—new, vivid as
The lightning's flash—

Our Cleanthes will live
Again! The Jewish baby God has won;
—And with his hand and stretched-out arm has fought
The fight, and conquered death: Great Pan is dead!
There is no other God save one;—the Great
Jehovah and His Son!
This morning as
I sat beside the silent bier of our
Beloved one; Thyrsis, with trembling hands,
Brought to me words of life.
—Lucanus sent
A many months agone, a treatise writ
From Macedonia. (He travels with
One Paulus—who 'tis said was called to preach
The Word in Philippi.)
Shall we not read
The treatise by the bier of our beloved
Cleanthes?—It brings life Antigone!

ANTIGONE

Read on beloved;—though I see naught but death!

(Theophilus produces a scroll of parchment, written in close characters of Greek, Together they approach the bier. With one arm around Antigone, and the other holding the document, he reads.)

' "For as much as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things

which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou has been instructed."'

ANTIGONE

The certainty of those things! Of what things
Beloved?

THEOPHILUS

Spoke we not a moment gone
Of Lucas, and the great God, Christ?

ANTIGONE

I see
As through a mist, Theophilus! Read on—

THEOPHILUS

(*Reading*)
* * * "And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee

named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary " * * *

(*Hand in hand, with quickened breath they sit as Theophilus reads through the treatise. The room becomes darkened as the last rays of the flickering twilight fall upon the face of Cleanthes. Antigone rises, and with trembling hands, lights the small lamps, that throw a pale glow upon the parchment. Seating herself again;—she speaks:*)

Theophilus, read once again the tale
Of that dead lad in Nain, Christ brought to life.
—I almost see the weeping mother now;
And them that stood beside to comfort her!
Small comfort could they give to her, who had
Lost all; as we have O Theophilus!
—And yet; Luke says there was One who stood by
Full of compassion who could give new life:
—Read of that One, beloved,—of that Christ—!

THEOPHILUS

(*Reading.*)

* * * "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said unto her, Weep not * * * And he said Young man I say unto thee Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak."

ANTIGONE

Luke speaks of others too raised from the dead!
Think what it meant to Jairus to once more
Fold close against his heart that loving form;
—The little maid who crept into his life,
To make the ruler of the Synagogue
More human; understanding more the needs
Of lesser men and women.
—Rulers to
Rule well, need the warm clasp of baby arms,
And plastic touch of childish hands, to mould
The sterner metal of their natures to
A pitying love for all humanity—!
Theophilus, how could they crucify
That Christ;—The God who raised their dead!

THEOPHILUS

'Twas not
Those ones whose dead had felt Christ's smile!
Luke speaks
Of envy, malice, and of one false friend
Named Judas—Fickle multitudes who first
Proclaim Him King; and then condemn:
Of Pilate much too weak to stand between
This God and death.—Yet in the end; death could
Not conquer Him who rose again! Dost note
The end of this most rare, strange narrative?

(*Reading again.*)

"And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven."

ANTIGONE

(*Speaking to herself.*)

"That thou mightest know the certainty!"

(*To Theophilus.*)

Theophilus, I know it now; as thou
May'st never know! I know the certainty;
As women know the certainty of their
Own babe beneath their heart;—who've never seen
Its tiny face, nor felt its breath of life
Upon their cheek; and yet they know, ay and
Love too, that little throbbing, pulsing form,
Folded so safe and warm within their care.
Theophilus, I sometimes pity men
Who only know the certainty of death;
—They never know the certainty of life!
That joy God gives unto us mothers; who
Need such joy to sweeten the wild anguish;
And make all else of naught avail, but that
We have brought forth a child to nestle in
Our waiting arms, and make the earth to which
He's come, a fairer place in which to live.

(*Rising hurriedly.*)

Haste! haste! Theophilus—we needs must haste!
Call thou the lad Thyrsis!

(*Theophilus goes out and returns with Thyrsis.*)

THYRSIS

Thou callest me
My mistress?

ANTIGONE

Ay, Thyrsis.

THEOPHILUS

What wilt thou love?

ANTIGONE

We have much work to do afore the morn!
—No funeral pyre shall claim our precious boy;
And rob us of his merry face; lick his
Fair curls, which I have polished like to gold
Around my finger; rend his tender form
And turn to smoke and ashes those blue orbs
Which shone and sparkled like the stars at night!
Mind ye of that strange Altar on Mars hill;
—Built years agone unto the Unknown God?

Oft have I heard the tale retold, of this
New God who healed the plague when all the gods
Of Greece had failed.—This God who cared enough
For men, to help the sick, and banish death;
To listen to the wail of Mothers robbed
Of their first-born:—I see it clear! This God
It was who sent His Son into the world
To live the life, and die the death, that we
Who know what death does mean, may see the sign
Of His own wondrous love!

THEOPHILUS

—There thou wouldst take
Our precious lad?

ANTIGONE

Ay, love; and lay him like
The dear Lord Christ! His tender form will we
Anoint with spices rare and ointments sweet;
And 'round his dear fair face the finest of
White linen bind.
Perchance in seeing this
The Great God,—thinking of His risen Son,—
Will tear him from his new made grave, and say
To our own little lad, as once He said
To him of Nain:
"Young man I say to thee arise."
And then when we have left him there, beneath
The shadow of the altar steps—we'll on

—On—to that Bethany! For where He rose;
A voice within me tells He'll come again!

THEOPHILUS

Antigone, thou'rt right; We'll leave all else
Behind.—Our gardens and our flowers fair;
And the sweet palace by th' Aegean Sea!
No more for us the nightingales will sing:
Nor myrtle trees put forth their fragrance rich;
For to us too the call has come! and hand
In hand, with but our love for each; we'll turn
Our steps towards Bethany!

ANTIGONE

Ay, on to Bethany!

PART II

NIGHT

Scene I. (*A narrow street. Nearby are seen the city walls, terminating in a great triumphal Colonnade,—in the centre of which are the massive city gates.*)

A WATCHMAN BEARING TORCH

Ho! who approacheth!

SECOND WATCHMAN ALSO WITH TORCH

Who but such an one
As thou! Think'st any else walk Athen's streets
When all make merry on th' Acropolis?
Pah! To what uses are we put to watch
The stones;—they will not steal, nor burn, nor play
The wanton!

FIRST WATCHMAN

Ho! but yonder one comes with
A festive air—as if with goodly victuals
He had kept company; or his lips wet
With sparkling grapes of jovial Bacchus!

ENTER CITIZEN

Ho
There! ho there! thinkest thou to pass us so?

CITIZEN, COMING BACK

What would'st thou watchman?

BOTH TOGETHER

News, fellow!

FIRST WATCHMAN

Think'st thou
We be as dead as these fire-brands we hold?

CITIZEN

Ye do have surly tongues ye rogues!

SECOND WATCHMAN

Why then,
If surly, we'll soon mend them, if thou wilt
But use thine own for gossiping.

CITIZEN

What would
Ye know?

FIRST WATCHMAN

Of the feast unto Athene;—
Wast thou not there from morn until but now?

CITIZEN

Ay, was I there, since Helios touched with
Roseate glow the blue Aegean waves;
Changing each azure sea-flower blossom
Into a mass of rosy laurel bloom!
What shall I tell, and where shall I begin?

SECOND WATCHMAN

At the beginning,—where else thinkest thou?

FIRST WATCHMAN

Nay, waste not time upon the anthems sung;
Anthems are anthems throughout all the world.
—Give me but action; and leave all the music
Unto the fools and women-folk!
Begin
Thou at the wrestling games;—by all the gods,—
I'll wager thee, Lysias could pinion to
The ground any in all Athens!

SECOND WATCHMAN

Put up
Thy wager!

FIRST WATCHMAN

Two staters on Lysias!

SECOND WATCHMAN

Pah! give a wager something worth—a scorn
Upon two staters!—I will wager five
On Pentheus—hast seen him? Strong and hard
As any lion's whelp; with muscles firm
As coils of polished steel.

FIRST WATCHMAN

Ha! what is steel
When one encounters Hercules? I tell
Thee, man, he had no showing!

SECOND WATCHMAN

And I say
He had!

FIRST WATCHMAN

(Draws his sword.)
And I say he had not—villain!
Take that!

SECOND WATCHMAN

(Drawing his sword.)—
And thou that!
(They both lean their torches against the wall and start fighting.)

CITIZEN

Peace men!—how can I
Tell ye of the most mighty games; when ye
Do meet each other in embroilment?

FIRST WATCHMAN

I
Care naught for the games;—I say Lysias won!

SECOND WATCHMAN

And I say Pentheus, thou knave! ho help!
Help here! ho help!—Thou takest my life's blood!

(They pass on fighting, Citizen trying to separate them.)

(Enter Theophilus and Antigone.)

ANTIGONE

Was not the place most wondrous fair, mine own
Theophilus? Methought the earth seemed warmer
For its precious burden;—throbbing with joy
To hold his tender form; and little buds
Did burst in snowy bloom to match their whiteness
With his own!

THEOPHILUS

Ay, mine own Antigone;
Earth never seemed so fair, so grand in her
Maternity; as when she stretched her all
Embracing arms, to take from thine our own
Beloved one!
—Dear love, to-night I had
A vision strange and wondrous sweet:
From on
The summit of that star-crowned hill, as far
As eye could see or thought could reach; I saw
The temples of our pagan gods,—with their
Rich balustrades and colonnades, blooming
So white beneath the rising moon,—droop as
A flow'r that has fulfilled its life; or as
A rose from whence the perfume's gone, before
The budding of this new white bloom—this Christ,
Who builds His temples in our hearts; and draws
From them the sweetest incense of our praise!

And from the sod, above our little lad,
I seemed to see the lilies growing tall;
—Great seeds of our own faith, Antigone,
Planted by us, and spreading o'er all Greece!

ANTIGONE

Ay, love, Athens' first Christian grave!

THEOPHILUS

But soft,
—Some one approaches.
Stand thou here, while I
Go yonder by the Eastern Gate.—Perchance
'Tis but some reveller from the games: Fain would
I shield thy wounded heart from rough conflict!

(*He goes and looks,—then returns.*)

Ay, as I said; only 'tis more than one—
—The night is further spent than e'en I thought;
And with the passing of the midnight hour
Comes back the half of Athens from the Feast;
Making our sorrow, and our new found faith,
A mockery!
Come here, dear love, we'll hide
Us in the shadows of the colonnade.
—I know thou mother sheep, e'en though thou hast
Found peace, art bleating for the little lamb.

(They stand aside while from the distance is heard music, which gradually grows louder. The torch bearers approach, carrying long burning brands, followed by Priests chanting; then the women bearing baskets in which are seen the implements which were used at the sacrifice during the morning. Then flower girls and dancers. The successful competitor in the musical contest, crowned with a golden crown; followed by the olive-wreathed Athlete, carrying a large Greek urn filled with the sacred oil. More torches, charioteers, etc., a medley of light, color and music.)

CHORUS

Hail! O ye children of Athens; our joy in the day
is complete;
Royal in garments of splendor, with gold and with
jewels replete,
Stands she, Athene, the blessed, with gifts of our
love at her feet.

Robed in a Peplos of saffron; of cobwebs and lillies
its weave,
Broidered in pearls, the old legends of heroes and
gods on her sleeve,
Goddess of strength and of wisdom; our incense
and praise doth receive.

Daughter of Zeus, the Supreme One; Sovereign in
power and might.
Wielder of spear to the war song.—In peace the
great donor of light.
Aegis and spear are beside her, with olive and
myrtle bedight.

PRIESTS CHANTING

Slain are the sheep and the oxen; poured over the Altar is wine;
Burning are myrrh and sweet aloes, and hundreds of torches outshine
Luna's great orb of the midnight. All hail to the Goddess divine!

A BYSTANDER

Who wears the wreath of the victor? Who carries the urn with the oil?

CHORUS

Lysias, born but to triumph, with sinews and muscles that coil
Firm 'round the form of a rival; his nerve and his strength to despoil!

A BYSTANDER

Who read the lays of our Homer? Who danced to the lute and the lyre?
Who rode the fierce steed of Sparta? Who sang, the gold crown to acquire?

CHORUS

Cadmus and Cleon the crowned ones; Behold ye
the victors' attire!

Cadmus has won for his Sparta, the cloak of a
warrior bold;
On his broad back hangs the Pallium; its sumpt-
uous lengths do enfold
All his great form in its beauty; with tassels and
trimmings of gold.

Cleon, the sweetest of singers with voice like to
Orpheus' own,
Burnished with silvery laughter, and deepened by
life's undertone,
Song bird of Athens, we hail thee, and place on thy
brow the great crown!

SONG OF THE DANCERS

We've danced to the sound of the cymbals clash;
We've swayed to the tones of the harps of gold;
With pulses fierce beating and eyes that flash,
With passion grown dim as a tale long told.
O joy for the throbbings of mad desire!
O sad is the rhythm of hearts grown old!

WEAVERS OF THE PEPLOS

Tender, gentle maidens we;
Spotless in our purity.

Of a ray of pale moon beam,
And a lily's breath, did seam
Into vesture, to adorn
Her we've crowned this joyous morn!

FIRST PHILOSOPHER

What mummery is this the people shout?
—Think you a carven stone with hair of gold,
And eyes of polished gems, could harken to
The tumult of their cheers and songs of praise?

SECOND PHILOSOPHER

Sh—sh—speak but softly;—Greece is Greece this day
As 'twas when Socrates the hemlock drank
Four hundred years agone. It brooks not of
A thought outspoke—but clings to beauteous form
And color of the fruit,—the more the seed
Is rotten at the core!

FIRST PHILOSOPHER

Of them do I
Fear naught, life is but life to me, with skies
Of blue, and twinkling stars and golden wine,—
And death! And after death—who knows!—who knows?

(Enter Lysander.)

Good friends, is it of death ye speak; or does
My mind but echo words engraven on
My beating heart?—Or as, when we have lain
Us down to rest, and sleep has closed our care—
Worn eyes; each thought, which seemed so sweet beneath
The shining sun, becomes distort, and like
An hydra-headed monster, sears and burns
Us with its fiery breath.

SECOND PHILOSOPHER

What ails thee man?

LYSANDER

Hast thou not heard how grief has come, to lay
Its clammy hand upon Theophilus?
Sit at his hearth, and stare forever out
His young wife's eyes.—Be with their waking thoughts
And their good night?

SECOND PHILOSOPHER

Ay, I have heard his son
Was dead; but all must die—wherefore not now?

VOICE IN THE CROWD

Who talks of death, to-night of all nights?—Pah!
Thy very garments reek of funeral pyres;
And thy long face doth give but insult to
Our merry-making—Tra la! old long face!

FIRST PHILOSOPHER

Lysander, come with us—we are not gay
—But may perchance enliven thy sad heart!

LYSANDER

Nay, go ye on!—when all this surging crowd
Have passed, I'll take my heart-ache to my friend's
Sore heart; and share with him his grief, e'en as
I have his joy.

(*They all move on. As the last dancer disappears in the distance, far off sounds of the chorus are heard.*)

Hail—O—ye—children—of—

LYSANDER

(*Speaking to himself*).

At last, they're gone!—Theophilus, I would
I could thy sorrow take: Ye gods!—To think

With all our love, when grief comes, we only
Can stand, and see it waste, and sear, and burn;
And we, who'd gladly give our lives, can with
Our faltering speech but show the fragments of
Our pity.

(*Theophilus and Antigone approach.*)

THEOPHILUS

Lysander! Thou!

LYSANDER

Ay, Theophilus,
I have but heard thy sorrow and Antigone's,
And with my hastening steps to thee, do seek
The threshold of thy grief; to hold unto
My heart thy pain, e'en as before I've held
The little lad.

THEOPHILUS

Good friend, I thank thee from
My heart, but now 'tis not for me to bid
Thee enter there;—the door is closed, and in
That hour of travail known to Antigone
And me, was born a twin unto our pain.
—It wears the form of our loved child, but has
The lineaments of One, Lucanus spoke

Of in his dreams. We call this new-sent babe,
Born of our anguish and despair,—" God's faith "—
Some day we'll share that with thee too, as we
Have shared Cleanthes love:—only not now;
This babe is small and young, and we must needs
Tend it.
We go to-night to Bethany!

LYSANDER

Theophilus, has grief made thee distraught?

THEOPHILUS

Nay, friend,—methinks 'tis but now I am sane.
Dost mind thee of my freedman, Luke?

LYSANDER

Ay, as
Of one to dream dreams and see visions—What
Of him? (*Turning to Antigone*)

Antigone, what means he, has
My friend gone mad?

ANTIGONE

If mad, we both are; and
Such madness I would wish for thee.—Such joy

In pain! I'd gladly see thee stoop to drink
Life's chalice to the utmost brim; if in
Its dregs thou too could'st find the honey mixed
Therewith! Lucanus was our slave, but now
'Tis he who's made us debtors unto him—
—If in his visions he could pierce beyond
The veil into the great white light;
—So in his dreams, he has shown us a star
Whose beams can light the world; and sing a new
Song to our hearts.

LYSANDER

And is there aught beyond?

ANTIGONE

Ay, life!

LYSANDER

I understand ye not, and yet,
I see a pow'r that worketh in ye which
I know not of.
—Ye speak of leaving Athens!
That do I understand.—Must this new faith
Make us as strangers?

THEOPHILUS

Nay, friend—we will write
—Perchance will send Lucanus, or this Paul
He travels with; whose fame indeed has reached

To wondrous lengths, when we do hear his name
From Antioch, as in a trail of light.
To Philippi.—I hear 'tis even said
He'll visit Athens ere the next Olympiad.

LYSANDER

Perchance; all some time visit Athens.—But
Of Luke?

THEOPHILUS

I'll leave his missive in thy hands.
—May it but give to thee, the hope—the faith
—The Christ—e'en as it gave to us. Then will
We be as brothers. Now as friends—farewell!

LYSANDER

Farewell, dear friends! The gods be with ye! If
mad,
I too would share thy madness: if to me
Could come such faith as I now do look on!

ONE HOUR LATER

Scene 2. (*Shipboard—with view of harbor. On the left in the distance, are seen the lights upon the Acropolis. On the right is the Sacred Island of Elis, from whence can be seen the Statue of Victory, and the Golden Shield hanging beneath it upon the Temple of Zeus, standing out bright and clear in the moon-light.*)

(*Enter Theophilus assisting Antigone.*)

THEOPHILUS

Courage, dear love!—one step the more, and we
Have cut our old life as Atropos doth
Her thread. Henceforth we are as far removed
As if we'd even lain us down to die;
And wakened in that new and perfect life
Lucanus told us of beyond the grave.

ANTIGONE

I need not courage, love, for I am strong.
—Stronger than thou, Theophilus! So oft
I've felt our little babe upon my heart
That I can feel him now; only he's grown
To be a lad, and I can see his face,
And hear his merry laugh, and feel his lips
On mine, and kiss his precious curls like gold!
—We've lain him 'neath the stars upon Mars Hill;

But in my mother's heart, I fold him still,
Wait and content me, 'till this new-found Christ
Shall give him to mine empty arms again.—

THEOPHILUS

Antigone, could'st bear such joy? Would not
Thy wounded heart burst of its own rapture,
And all the precious wine drops spill from out
The overflowing chalice of thy love?

ANTIGONE

Nay, God would not allow it so! Somehow
Methinks the Christ who gave me back my dead
Could still my pulses beating ere they leaped
Beyond their bounds.—Dost think that Mother, in
The far off Nain, did fall before her gift
Of wondrous love; and in her agony
Of joy, could not unto her bosom hold
Her son? You know not mothers yet, beloved!
Theophilus, this much I know; all hearts
Of mothers beat the same, and what He said
To her, He'll say to me, somehow—somewhere
—And we can wait, knowing this well, that if
Our little lad comes not to us again,
Then we can go to him—beyond the stars!
Theophilus, hearest thou aught besides
The wind upon the sea? It hath the sound
Of far-off weeping,—None must weep to-night
—Our new birth night! Do any sail with us?

THEOPHILUS

Nay, love, none but the Captain and his mates;
We've taken sail upon a merchant ship
For Joppa bound.—We carry thither stores
Of honey, citrons, limes and luscious figs;
Besides, have we the little barley cakes
None know so well the mixing of, as we
Of Athens.

ANTIGONE

Hark! I hear it still—it is
A voice.—A human cry!

(*Thyrsis rushes out from where he is hidden and throws himself on his knees.*)

THEOPHILUS

Thyrsis! Thou lad?

THYRSIS

My master—mistress!

THEOPHILUS

Lad, how cam'st thou here?

THYRSIS

Master, forgive,—I could not stay behind;
—The God who called to thee must need me too!
I know I am a simple lad—thy slave;
But will He not look down upon a slave?
This morn, when thou didst send me from thy side,
For grief I threw me by the colonnade,
And heard thee read Luke's missive; and I thought
That Simeon in the Temple, as he held
The little God-sent Babe within his arms,
Meant me, as well as thee, when he did speak
Those words of prophesy to all the world.

THEOPHILUS

Thyrsis, thou'rt right; the light was meant for thee
E'en as for us! 'Tis not for me to bid
Thee stay.—Thou could'st not now e'en though thou would'st.
Look lad, how far we've left the shore behind!

(*Thyrsis goes to the side of the vessel and gazes in wonderment. Theophilus turns to Antigone.*)

See, love, the lights grow dim upon the Parthenon;
And we approach the sacred Isle of Zeus:
Look how the moon doth like a white dove's wing
Bespeak of peace upon the sleeping Elis!
Soon, with the rising sun, will wake to life
Once more the nodding grain.—The sheep will stretch

Their limbs and seek to find green pastures and
The cooling streams—The lambs will gambol on,
And frisking back, will press their noses cool
Against the warm full udders waiting them.
Then will there cease the lusty song, the frog
In ecstacy doth sing unto his mate;
To sound once more the droning of the bee,
As from the almond tree she flits about
And in her tiny pouch the seed of life
Doth take, with love, unto the budding flow'r.
—The grapes will purple on the hanging vines:
And limes, in yellow splendor, like to balls
Of gold, will pendant be from laden trees;
—Yet will we not be there, nor see again!

ANTIGONE

Nay, but we know a peace they know not of
Upon that Isle, known as the land of Peace!
See how, dear love, the moon already wanes,
And weary doth appear of keeping watch;
Her lustrous mantle folds she down and sinks
To sleep beneath the ever sleepless waves.
How shine the stars in all their glory bright!
Didst ever see such wondrous sheen before?

THEOPHILUS'

'Tis not the stars, Antigone, but thine
Own hope!
Dost mind thee of that day when first

I held thee in mine arms as I do now,
My fluttering bird?—Thou wast so young, so frail
So fair, and I so like a Titan in
My strength:—I kissed thee on thy hands, thy brow
And on thy rosy lips so close to mine.
—I pressed thy lids down o'er thy violet eyes
Until thy golden head sank with its weight
Of love upon my breast; and we who'd held
Life's crown, wore it with beating hearts. Then thou
Didst raise thine eyes until their depths met mine,
Then higher still, until they reached unto
The arching skies:
"How blue the heavens seem Theophilus!"
Love, I did laugh for joy,
And hold thy hands, as little rose-buds crushed
Within mine own!
Life is but ever like
An Hyacinthus stone; and changes tint
With every fickle mood the day doth wear;
—When all is bright, so tender blue it shines,
And yet to ashy gray becomes, when clouds
Are overcast, and rain-drops fall. But when
Love comes!—it paints upon the sky, the pure
And changeless sapphire hue, in token of
Its constancy.
The sky is always blue
For Love;—as Hope doth make the stars to shine!

ANTIGONE

The which is greater then, beloved, Love
Or Hope?

THEOPHILUS

Methinks the twain could scarcely live
Apart; and yet they need a third to make
The crown complete.

ANTIGONE

God's Faith?

THEOPHILUS

Ay love, God's Faith.

(*To Thyrsis.*)

Didst bring thy harp lad? Sing to us a song
Attune to our own hearts, and to the stars.
—Oft have I heard thee, when thou knew'st it not,
Speak all thy soul unto the answering strings.

THYRSIS

Master, my songs are simple things:—I tune
The music to the words, as one by one,
They fall as beads from off a loosened thread.

(*He strikes the harp and sings.*)

O Gracious Star
That on that sleeping town did shine;
And from afar
Lead wise men to the Babe divine,
O star of Faith, enlight my life with sparks of thine!

Star of the Morn